

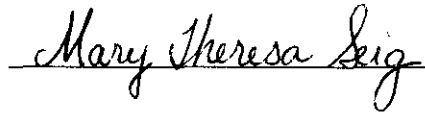
Identity Formation: Women's Magazine Language

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary Theresa Seig", written over a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT

This linguistic analysis of women's magazines begins with an introduction to sociolinguists' research on identity formation. Following the introduction is a basic study of two women's magazines, SELF and Cosmopolitan, examining how the magazines' linguistic features shape and identify the female reader. Covered next are the methods and results of sociolinguists' studies of magazine language. The methods used in these sociolinguists' research are then applied to the analysis of four women's magazines, Elle, Glamour, Ms., and The Oprah Magazine. The remainder of the analysis examines the linguistic features of the magazines' covers and article text. Following a detailed analysis of these components, conclusions are drawn about how each magazine defines the female reader, noting similarities and differences among the four.

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INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Identity and Magazine Discourse

Sociolinguistics

Culpeper (2001) states, “In sociolinguistics, identity is most frequently understood to be the way in which people identify themselves with social groups, categories, or stereotypes” (p. 16). Furthermore, identity is shaped by many social factors, including discourse. A sociolinguist researching discourse and its connection to identity formation is likely to ask, “What linguistic features does a speaker select in order to identify him/herself with or distinguish him/herself from particular groups?” (Culpeper, 2001, p. 12).

Within magazine discourse, magazine producers present text with which they hope their readers will identify. Moreover, producers of women’s magazines use linguistic tools to create definitions of femininity and reader identity, goals, and interests. In this study of women’s magazines, discourse will be referred to as the “internal organisation of the text which gives it coherence” (McLoughlin, 2000, p. 18).

McLoughlin (2000) treats the study of discourse of women’s magazines as a study in linguistic determinism, which purports that magazine text producers present a worldview—their worldview, in particular—to readers in order to convince them to adopt the same. Johnstone (2002) explains that through the lens of linguistic determinism, categories of language determine categories of perception. A less extreme approach to analyzing magazine discourse may be accomplished by looking through the lens of linguistic relativism, which is based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and asserts that people generally categorize things in the world according to the way their language

categorizes things grammatically. In other words, the way a person's language categorizes things is bound to influence the way he/she perceives things, including his/her identity.

Johnstone (2002) elaborates upon this theory, explaining that it may appear that texts describe things in relation to an external world—that the world is the cause and that the text is the effect. However, discourse both reflects and creates our realities and worldviews. Just as discourse reflects language and culture patterns, language and culture create discourse (Johnstone, 2002). Furthermore, discourse reflects and is created by language and culture patterns associated with gender. Culpeper (2001) points out that gender, in fact, is one of the ways readers understand characters in texts. Gender, then, is one of the ways readers understand identities created by magazines.

The main character of women's magazines is undoubtedly the reader. Women's magazines are generally targeted at women, because women often want to read about women and what is important and relevant to women's lives. The language of women's magazines, therefore, constructs definitions of reader identity based upon definitions of femininity. If, as Culpeper (2001) claims, identity is communicated by presenting and understanding characteristics, the text of women's magazines indeed communicates female reader identity.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a school of thought that attempts to answer how discourse and ideology are intertwined. CDA recognizes that discourse is an activity through which ideology is circulated and reproduced. In relation to women's magazine discourse, magazine texts develop and replicate ideologies of female reader identity. Johnstone (2002) points out that magazine producers are able to manipulate this ideology

through language—grammar, style, wording, etc.. Through language, women's magazine producers create a lens through which the reader may see herself and the world.

Pilot Study

Before delving deeper into the text of several recent issues of women's magazines, I will review an introductory analysis of two women's magazines in relation to their basic features. I conducted this analysis as a pilot in an earlier linguistics course, and from this pilot, I have developed a more extensive analysis of women's magazine language.

The February 2002 issues of two women's magazines, *Self* and *Cosmopolitan*, use linguistic tools to create definitions of femininity and reader identity, values, goals, and interests. Although the magazines target the same gender and age group--women, generally between the ages of eighteen and thirty--each creates unique definitions.

The front cover of a magazine may be assumed to be its most important advertisement. It is the front cover that initially grabs the attention of the consumer; if the cover appeals to the reader, then the magazine's content will most likely also create definitions of femininity and reader identity that are pleasing to the reader. Cover-lines attempt to summarize the entire content of the magazine within a small space and, simultaneously, spark the interest of the consumer. McLoughlin (2000) asserts that, consequently, much of the language of cover-lines is highly intensified.

Cover-lines imply the tone of the magazine: declarative, imperative, interrogative, or exclamatory. They may establish a belief of the reader, urge her to action, prompt her to a question, or encourage her to become motivated or interested in a particular subject. Information that is not vital to understanding a cover-line, such as determiners, finite

verbs, and sometimes, subjects, is often cut out. Language “tricks” are also used to attract the attention of the reader: rhyme, alliteration, assonance, superlatives, intertextuality, idiomatic phrasing, and nominalization (McLoughlin, 2000). Several of these language tricks are used on the front covers of *Self* and *Cosmopolitan*.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines alliteration as “the repetition of the same sounds or the same kinds of sounds at the beginning of words or in stressed syllables.” The first cover-line of *Self* reads, “99 secrets to a happier, healthier you!” (see Appendix A). The alliterated words, and hence, those emphasized, are “happier” and “healthier,” adjectives which address the well being of the reader. Another cover-line of *Self* reads, “The sneaky ways your state is stealing your right to choose,” which alliterates the “s” sound in “sneaky,” “state,” and “stealing.” This language trick draws attention to a governmental and political issue, and therefore implies that the reader is interested in the ways that politics and societal concerns affect her life. The “s” alliteration in the cover-line, “7 smarter ways to snack without a single celery stick” implies that snacking is not bad, but is only done badly; the reader should continue to snack, but in a “smarter” way. The reader’s identity is constructed in this cover-line as a realistic one, and not as an idealistic image of thinness. Alliteration is used to emphasize what is most important on the cover, to make it memorable. Through the use of alliteration, these cover-lines focus on the reader as an independent person who is seeking ways to improve her life in areas of health and political awareness.

Cosmopolitan also uses alliteration to draw its reader into the rest of the text (see Appendix B). The alliteration of “t” in the cover-line, “4 Secret Pleasure Trails Every Man Has (Take a Private Tour Tonight!),” drawing attention to the reader’s partner and

his sexual satisfaction. The same theme presents itself in the alliterated cover-lines, “You and Him, Happy as Hell,” and “How to Stay Blissfully Bonded.” Each of these cover-lines addresses and defines the reader not as an individual, but as half of a human bond, seeking ways by which to improve her relationship.

Imperative phrasing, which expresses a command or order, is common among cover-lines; it implies a necessity for action on the part of the reader (McLoughlin, 2000). Supposing again that she accepts the advice and definitions of the magazine, the reader feels compelled to follow its instructions. A cover-line of *Self* urges the reader to “Act-Now,” because the “state is stealing [her] right to choose.” A cover-line of *Cosmopolitan* also urges its readers to act, in this case, upon “The One Thing You Must Give Up to Have Utterly Satisfying Sex.” Again, the focus of the cover-lines is divided; of the former, it is self-satisfaction and awareness, of the latter, it is sexual satisfaction of the members of a relationship.

Of the first two readers’ letters featured in *Self*, one begins, “As a researcher on the effect of the media on children’s lives, I...” and continues with a focus on the life and experience of the reader as the subject (see Appendix C). The author of the letter identifies herself as a researcher, and it is likely that her audience then identifies her as moderately to highly intelligent, educated, and concerned with world issues. She continues, asserting, “...food ads aimed at kids are a key factor in the growing obesity epidemic,” switching her focus to an increasingly worsening world issue and exemplifying her expertise in the field. By choosing this letter, the producers of *Self* imply that knowledgeable, assertive women are valuable assets to the readers at large. The second letter’s author makes her point, stating that, “More important than a degree is

a person's qualifications," debating the value of the professional and practical qualifications of a working person. The subject, and therefore, the point of interest, is the debate of job qualifications. By choosing this letter, the magazine producers imply that their reader believes that women are valuable assets in the workforce, whether they possess a college degree or not. *Self* defines its feminine reader as well informed, capable, and frankly cosmopolitan.

The first reader's letter of *Cosmopolitan* also indicates the reader as the subject, "...I whipped out my highlighter and got ready to put some of the advice to work (see Appendix D). Invite those men from *Maxim* to contribute more often." In this letter, the reader explains her reaction to the advice of men from a men's magazine. In the second part, the "men from *Maxim*" function as the direct object, a vital part of the letter's message. The second of the readers' letters designates a true-life magazine story as the subject, "Laurie Cicotello's story...touched me to my soul because my father is also a transsexual...this has always been a shameful story to me." Functioning as the direct object, the reader speaks of the pain she has experienced caused by her father's sexual orientation. Based on these letters, the reader of *Cosmopolitan* is being defined as emotionally aware; the second letter identifies the reader's emotional connection with another reader's struggle. However, these letters also show the reader to be fully focused on her relationships with men and the effects men's opinions and actions have on her life. The first letter expresses a desire to hear more of men's opinions, while the second expresses the harmful effects a man has had on the reader's life.

The editor of *Self* expresses, through the use of nouns and modifiers, that she values other people, particularly, older, wiser females, and their wisdom by alleging, "big

sisters...share intimate details and honest advice” (see Appendix E). Through her use of nouns and modifiers we learn that she also values, “tips so knowing and original,” of “experts...real people...athletes training for the Olympics.” The modifying adjectives and verbs used about snacking demonstrate that the editor values the active establishment of wise eating habits, as shown in the line, “gave the office vending machine a healthy makeover...to transform our...munching habits.” Furthermore, nouns, verbs, and their modifiers used within the letter indicate that the editor values active effort for self-improvement, particularly related to physical and mental health. She describes this active commitment, describing her efforts to “[try] every day to integrate another healthy habit...chase out more unhealthy behavior...tackle the single thing...stressing me out most.”

The editor’s page of *Cosmopolitan* also features a letter encouraging women to actively participate in and enhance their lives (see Appendix F). However, the advice given by the editor defines the reader as more concerned with striving to be “always fun, fearless, and female” than with exploring health issues. The nouns used for the reader’s role models and the adjectives modifying them celebrate the “Fun Fearless Female awards given to the gutsiest women in entertainment.” The editor also identifies the reader through verbs, nouns, pronouns and their modifiers, as apprehensive and seeking support, troubled by “something [she’s] been dying to tackle, but [she’s] feeling slightly anxious...page 141 for encouragement.” Advising that “good things come when you refuse to let fear get in the way of your heart’s desire,” the editor further defines the reader as generally too timid to pursue her goals.

Usually found in the closing pages of the magazine, horoscope pages are created by producers who aim to provide the reader with a positive self-image, often through flattery (McLoughlin, 2000). Verb patterns used on this page are typically auxiliary, implying a certain level of familiarity between the reader and the producer. These auxiliary verbs allow the magazine writer to identify the mood of the horoscope entry, whether it is one of doubt, ability, possibility, or obligation. Obviously, there is no personal relationship shared between reader and writer, but the establishment of mood allows the producers to address and target a certain type of reader.

The horoscopes for Aquarius, Aries, and Gemini in *Self* contain, primarily, verbs which prompt the reader to face intimidating obstacles, take assertive action, and strive for self-improvement (see Appendix G). These verbs often construct imperative sentences, which command action. Aquarius is challenged to take on daunting physical challenges, “Tackle the impossible...start expanding your aerobic capacity...try climbing six flights of stairs a day.” In addition to improving physical satisfaction, Aries is prompted to pursue healthful contentment, “Assert yourself at work...break through a fitness plateau...push yourself and succeed!” The auxiliary verbs of Gemini’s horoscope create a mood of possibility and certainty, prompting the reader to hope for occupational improvement and energy, “Expect to get a sensational professional opportunity...you will have lots of energy around the 16th, so plan a long distance run or bike trip.” Moreover, the horoscopes in *Self* define the reader as capable and in pursuit of physical and professional improvement.

In *Cosmopolitan*, the Aquarius reader is urged to pursue greater sexual satisfaction with her partner and to stay on schedule, “Request erotic experimentation...set clocks

early...jot down fantasies” (see Appendix H). The horoscope’s verbs for Aries, too, create imperative sentences while prompting the reader to pursue sexual satisfaction, as well as effective goal-setting and peaceful personal relations, “Go for the goal...tackle projects...tie him to bedposts...curb criticism.” Again, Gemini is encouraged to seek sexual pleasure with her lover, in addition to organizing her thoughts, helping others, and decreasing rumor, “Take time to sort through the onslaught of new developments...ask him to pace himself...when you crave tantric-style sex...volunteer when your boss asks for help...keep from gossiping.” The reader of *Cosmopolitan* is created as a woman interested in issues of personal relations and time management, but primarily focused on shared, sexual relationships and her quest for pleasure.

Clearly, the language used in every section of a magazine contributes to its overall definition of the reader. Because the magazines, *Self* and *Cosmopolitan*, are targeted at female readers, the linguistic tools used also construct, simultaneously, definitions of reader identity and femininity. On a whole, the producers of *Self* create the female reader as a self-aware, capable, independent individual. She is interested in the world around her, but focused on the development of her own intellect, health, and happiness. On the contrary, *Cosmopolitan* creates the female reader as largely dependent on the perceptions of others, particularly men. She is less interested in self-development than she is in her relationships. Using similar linguistic tools to identify the values, goals and interests of the reader, each magazine creates a distinctive definition of her female identity.

Published Studies

Egins and Iedema (1997) performed a similar, more comprehensive semiotic study of two Australian women’s magazines, *New Woman* and *SHE*, and reported their

findings. Their purpose in performing the study was to answer how women's magazines present and maintain patriarchal definitions of femininity. Eggins and Iedema (1997) quickly identified that both of the magazines they analyzed "offer readers a different but largely consistent ideology of femininity" (p. 165). These ideologies, in turn, reveal the "working assumptions [of] (predominantly women) writers and editors" are "crucial in the positioning of their audiences" (p. 166).

While semiosis refers to the process of meaning-making, a magazine is a "semiotic product," of an institution—society—its priorities, interests, and assumptions (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 166). Eggins and Iedema (1997) performed their study based on research inspired by German researchers Erbring's and Shabedoth's work with a social semiotic approach to text. According to Erbring's and Shabedoth's work, text performs three main functions: ideational (representational reality), interpersonal (social relations), and textual (ideational and interpersonal meanings fit together) (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 167).

The researchers analyzed these functions on the basis of three principles: 1) analysis is quantitative; more or less frequent patterns appear; 2) analysis is cumulative; patterns are recognized recurrently and are reinforced and developed throughout the magazine's features; 3) analysis deals with visual and verbal patterns (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 168). The researchers applied these three principles to six key features in the magazines: cover, table of contents, letters to the editor, expert/advice columns, horoscopes, and main features.

After organizing textual patterns among the features in regard to semiotic function, Eggins and Iedema (1997) noted several similarities among the magazines. In

their article, they list these similarities as orientation to appearance, responsible heterosexuality, desocialization, personalization, and multi-modal similarities.

Orientation to appearance refers to the magazines' overwhelming tendency to present women as consumers, buying products to make their bodies more attractive to men (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 168). Responsible heterosexuality refers to the magazines' tendency to encourage readers to "desire and pursue heterosexual relationships and to take interpersonal responsibility for the success and failure of such relationships" (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 169). Articles tend to present relationships as "women's work," an issue of managing men. Desocialization refers to the magazines' trend to focus on the social issue of "binary sex/gender" (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 169). The division between men and women is emphasized, while other social differences are generally excluded. Personalization refers to the magazines' tendency to create an intimate relationship with the individual reader, bringing her into the center of the feminine community (Eggins & Iedema, 1997). Finally, multi-modal similarities refer to those of visual presentation, which I do not cover in my study.

Before reporting the results of my study of four women's magazines and how they use language to create identity for their readers, I want to make clear the ways by which we can recognize language patterns that give the magazines coherence. In my study, I will look at the text of women's magazine language, and it is therefore important for my readers to understand how vocabulary functions and is interconnected within the text. McLoughlin (2000) explains that vocabulary is held together in two ways, by both lexical cohesion and grammatical cohesion.

Lexically, vocabulary is unified by direct repetition, synonyms, superordination, specific to general reference, and ordered series. Words are emphasized when they are used repeatedly, or when their meanings are conveyed repeatedly through the use of synonyms. Also, meaning may be emphasized through superordination, which occurs when one word encompasses one or more other words in meaning. Using a specific to general reference about a person or thing also keeps description unified, as does the use of an ordered series (McLoughlin, 2000, p. 84-85).

Grammatically, vocabulary is held together by reference, personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, comparative reference, substitution and ellipsis, and conjunctions. These grammatical tools urge the reader of a text to keep reading, to find out more. For instance, a reference forces the reader to look to another source in order to understand the text fully. Personal pronouns used at the beginning of a sentence indicate that something else—most likely a noun—will follow later and will identify the person spoken about earlier. Demonstrative pronouns—words “the, this, that, these, those, here, there”—are verbal pointers which lead the reader to something else. Comparative references use the second term of three comparative words; for example, from the series, “good, better, best,” the word “better” would be used in the comparative reference. Substituting one item for another and leaving something out in an ellipsis are also techniques of grammatical cohesion. Finally, conjunctions such as “and, but, although, after, until” serve to unite vocabulary. Understanding these vocabulary cohesion patterns allows me to analyze the language of women’s magazines more technically in my own study.

While my earlier analysis of *Self* and *Cosmopolitan* does not address each of these issues and does not provide an exhaustive linguistic analysis, it does provide a general overview of textual analysis. This overview creates a basis for a more intense, more comprehensive analysis of four women's magazines, *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Ms.*, and *O*.

METHODOLOGY

Each of these magazines attracts female readers of the same generation. It appears that magazines *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* tend to attract women who are generally interested in topics of fashion and beauty, health, and relationships. These three magazines are organized similarly, with similar topical sections. Conversely, *Ms.* seems to attract women who are interested more in political issues, including those related to feminism and extraordinary women in the public's spotlight. *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* sell for a similar newsstand price, between \$3.50 and \$3.99. *Ms.* sells for a slightly higher newsstand price of \$5.95. Clearly, *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* are comparable publications, reaching a somewhat homogeneous group of women. *Ms.* is not as similar to the other three magazines, but still reaches women of a similar age group and confronts several related topics, such as women's health and relationships.

Elle is a multi-national magazine that focuses on telling and showing affluent young women--or young women who would like to be affluent--how to create unique, self-confident personal style. Cover to cover, *Elle* is a glamorous fashion magazine, featuring advice on clothing, hairstyles, beauty products, health, and fitness. Although the magazine focuses primarily on issues of physical appearance, it also features interviews and columns about figures and subjects in pop culture. Filled with a plethora of advertisements in between sections of text, the magazine is organized according to Table of Contents; On the Cover; Fashion and Features; Beauty, Health & Fitness; In Every Issue.

Glamour devotes a great amount of its text to the subject of sex and intimacy in heterosexual relationships. However, unlike other publications of its kind, such as

Cosmopolitan, *Glamour* seems to many women to be a more balanced publication, considering issues of in fashion, politics, and human interest. The covers of *Glamour* show the magazine to be focused, first and foremost, on sex and the female body, with articles about fashion and celebrities as well. *Glamour*'s content is organized into sections: Cover Reads; Beauty; Fashion; Men, Sex, Love; All About You; Your Health and Body; News, Views, and Reviews; In Every Issue.

In contrast to *Elle* and *Glamour*, *Ms.* focuses largely on women's rights in relation to feminism. Beginning in 1972, Gloria Steinem's publication declared the introduction of women's independence in journalism. Today, *Ms.* touches on countless women's issues, including abortion, domestic violence, date rape, and the politics surrounding each of them. Judging from the magazine's cover, many of its articles address legislation changes, as well as accomplishments of women involved in politics. This magazine is organized into sections as well: Features; News; Departments. A special section of the Winter 2002-2003 issue is dedicated to the "2002 Women of the Year."

O provides a fully Oprah experience from front to back. The magazine features much less information about fashion and beauty than *Elle* and *Glamour*; however, it does include plenty of advice about relationships, particularly those between men and women. Yet, the advice *O* has to offer about these relationships is less sex-based and more platonically-based than the advice of the other magazines. Other features include how-to articles on crafts and projects, inspirational interviews and articles about real-life women, and advice columns on fitness, health, and practical fashion. *O* is organized into sections as well: Health; Style; Great Food; Beauty; Fashion; Features; In Every Issue.

Using the format of Eggins's and Iedema's (1997) research summaries, I will summarize the linguistic patterns of several features of *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Ms.*, and *O* in regard to ideational and interpersonal patterns (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 171). As mentioned earlier, the cover of a magazine is its most important advertisement, a summary of what is to be found inside. The covers of *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Ms.*, and *O* each provide an overview of the magazine's content. In addition to linguistic patterns, the vocabulary—on the basis of lexical and grammatical cohesion—of the magazines' covers is also telling. While cover-lines provide summaries, the articles inside the magazines provide full texts, detailed descriptions of readers' interests, and definitions of femininity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1

Linguistic Patterns of Covers

Pattern	<i>Elle</i>	<i>Glamour</i>	<i>Ms.</i>	<i>O</i>
Ideational	+ Tight semantic focus: beauty, fashion, self-transformation + Action verbs = Hollywood locations	+ Flexible semantic focus: sex, self-transformation, beauty, fashion, health = Action verbs -Locations	+ Tight semantic focus: remarkable women, legislation changes + Action verbs - Locations	+ Flexible semantic focus: love, dating, sex, celebrities, health + Action verbs - Locations
Interpersonal	= Declarative clause types + Imperative clause types = Interrogative clause types + 'You' as subject, addressee + Positive lexis: new year, new you =Idiomatic expressions	+ Declarative clause types - Imperative clause types = Exclamatory clause types + 'You' as subject, addressee + Positive lexis: happy, new, amazing + Idiomatic expressions	+ Declarative clause types + Exclamatory clause types + 'We' as subject, addressee + Neutral lexis = Idiomatic expressions	+ Declarative clause types - 'You' as subject, addressee + Positive lexis: new, better, right, happily married, best, lovely, funny, sane -Idiomatic expressions

- + Text displays comparatively frequent use of a feature
- Text displays comparatively infrequent use of a feature
- = Text displays moderate use of a feature
- # Text displays variable use of a feature

Covers

Elle. From the vocabulary of the covers, I may further identify a magazine's focus and its messages about reader identity. Only one word on the cover of *Elle* (see Appendix I) is directly repeated. The word "new" is used twice and encompasses the overriding theme of the cover. Other words contributing to this theme include "transform," "makeovers," "new you." The cover also addresses other aspects of the reader's life

through words “career,” “work,” “love,” “relationship,” “hunk.” Moving from lexical cohesion patterns to grammatical ones, the cover of *Elle* displays many personal pronouns, all forms of “you.” The cover-line “New Year New You” leads the reader to wonder what that entails—what changes are suggested inside. The following part of that cover-line, “Transform your body style career relationship finances” leaves out punctuation and conjunctions in the list, as in an ellipsis. Clumping these things together one after another in a list implies that the transformation will be comprehensive, covering all the important aspects of the reader’s life.

Glamour. The most obvious lexical vocabulary pattern of the cover of *Glamour* is that of direct repetition. Forms of the word “sex” are used in 3 of the 6 cover-lines, 2 of which advertise instructional sex articles inside (see Appendix J). Even some cover-lines that do not blatantly mention sex imply the subject, as in “The 8 Things Men Wish We’d Do More of in Bed.” The major cover-line, set apart by large, bolded type, features the superordinate phrase, “‘Glamour, Make Me Over!’ 104 Amazing Before & Afters,” which also encompasses the ideas of the cover-lines, “Sexy, Fast Hair Interventions/So speedy you can sleep late,” and “Free! Glamour Makeovers,” and “The 8 Things Men Wish We’d Do More of in Bed.” Synonyms also appear on the cover, such as in the cover-line, “Sexy, Fast Hair Interventions/So speedy you can sleep late,” which emphasizes the importance of time efficiency. In terms of grammatical cohesion, *Glamour* features several personal pronouns on the cover, as the cover-line “Glamour, Make Me Over!” implies that there is a story inside about average, imperfect women, women much like the readers themselves.

Ms. No word is directly repeated on the cover of *Ms.* (see Appendix K). In fact, very few synonyms appear either. Groupings of words that share related meanings, such as those (“humor, humanity, and courage”) advertising the “2002 Women of the Year!” appear only once. The personal pronoun “we” is used on the cover of *Ms.* in the cover-line, “Nancy Pelosi: Exactly the Leadership We Need.” *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* use only the personal pronoun “you” to address the reader directly. *Ms.*, however, describes the reader as part of a group that includes the producers of the magazine.

O. Finally, the cover of *O* may also be examined on the basis of lexical and grammatical vocabulary cohesion (see Appendix L). An instance of general to specific reference occurs in a cover-line advertising an interview with Jay Leno, “about being funny on command, sane in a crazy business, and wild for his brilliant wife.” As for synonyms, 4 of the 7 cover-lines deal with the theme of love and intimacy, “Grown-Up Love/A new (better!) definition of romance,” “Choosing the right man/What happily married women know,” “The Shy Girl’s Guide to Sex,” and “Dating after divorce/The best way to get back in the game.” These cover-lines focus particularly on terms of marriage relationships with men, not just on relationships with men, as on the other magazines’ covers. Also, *O*’s cover features a comparative reference in the cover-line, “Grown-Up Love/A new (better!) definition of romance.” This cover-line promises guidelines inside for a better kind of romance for readers.

A magazine cover does, in fact, give an overview of an entire magazine’s content. Much information can be gathered from a magazine’s cover, as seen from the above analysis of the covers of *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Ms.*, and *O*. The cover-lines of these magazines provide a summary of the magazines’ definitions of reader identity; each magazine

advertises those articles and features that will be of the most interest to its readers. Therefore, the cover-lines advertise what is valuable to the reader, what the reader finds worthy of her time and energy.

Articles

Most women's magazines feature articles each month about women who have overcome hardship, accomplished extraordinary goals, or made remarkable achievements. *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Ms.*, and *O* all feature such articles in their January 2003 issues. Each of these magazines features an article about a female celebrity who has faced or continues to face a great challenge in her life. Within the articles, magazine journalists address the subject of these challenges and the ways the celebrities have confronted them.

Elle. *Elle* features an article about Australian born actress Nicole Kidman, who deals with the struggle of her divorce from actor Tom Cruise (see Appendix M). Budding actress Julie Stiles, who is trying to juggle a college education, film career, and many other endeavors simultaneously, is the star of *Glamour's* article. *Ms.* spotlights actress and children's book author Jamie Lee Curtis, who has learned to become comfortable with her body—so comfortable that she has bared it all for the public to read about and see. Finally, *O* shares the story of television actress Sheryl Lee Ralph's triumph over the depression brought on by her divorce.

Journalist Holly Millea of *Elle* magazine writes about "The new Nicole on being married, being alone, and being Virginia Woolf" in the article, "Who's Afraid of Nicole Kidman?" Although the entire article is centered on Kidman, the primary subject of the article is her marriage with and divorce from Cruise. In fact, Kidman's relationship with Cruise is directly mentioned 12 times in various manners, "holding Tom's hand," "in a

bubble with somebody,” “ten-year marriage.” At times, the focus switches from Kidman’s relationship with Cruise to her relationships with other men. Kidman discusses her interest in the “bad boy” on the “motorbike,” as well as her opinions on her “dreamy co-stars.”

Unsurprisingly, Kidman has positive comments to make about each of her “dreamy co-stars.” She refers to one as “Just one of the dearest, most gorgeous men to walk the earth,” and another as “Quirky, darling, and really underrated.” She seems to emphasize these men’s good looks, affectionately calling another, “Sexy and poetic.” Just as she admires her male co-stars, she admits being “extremely protective” of Cruise when they were married, so much so that she “revered him on a pedestal.” Evidently, Kidman casts the attractive men in her life in a dream-like atmosphere, in contrast to her apparent interest in the “boy on the bike.”

Also cast in a dream-like atmosphere is the actress. Kidman’s physical appearance is described as angelic, “head tilted, cheek in hand, fast asleep...in a white gauzy short-sleeved top and skirt,” with “wild strawberry-blond curls top knotted” above her “slender neck.” She is also described as injured, with “bruises up and down the inside of her arm, marring her pale skin” from some strenuous manual labor. Millea paints a picture of Kidman, who gazes with a “far-away look in her eyes” now that she has survived her divorce with Cruise and the “veil’s been drawn back” from her face. Now “lighter, brighter,” Kidman looks at her life through “blue eyes twinkling” and discusses the changes with Millea.

Besides painting a visual picture of Kidman for her readers, Millea characterizes Kidman with personality traits and direct quotations from the interview. As

“Hollywood’s new Lit Girl,” Kidman has now proven herself “one of the few actresses of her generation worthy of Meryl Streephood,” having recently released several noteworthy films, including *The Hours*. Millea clearly characterizes Kidman in two separate states of being: before her divorce from Cruise, and after her divorce from Cruise. Before the divorce, “her life had been so charmed and certain,” but Kidman has since had to face real struggle and pull from her inner-strength a “true ‘the show must go on’ spirit.” Co-worker Baz Luhrman is quoted by Millea saying that, since the divorce, Kidman appears to have awoken, to have become “in full possession of her power as an actress, her sexuality, her sense of self” through “the chrysalis of that experience” with divorce. As the article comes to a close and returns to lighter subjects, Millea emphasizes the new Kidman, “game for girlish fun” and “feeling more lighthearted now.” In the last paragraph of the article, Kidman reinforces this characterization, noting that she feels “so naive now,” but has “relief now, knowing that [she] can survive.”

Moreover, Kidman is characterized as innocent, blooming, fairy-like, and even injured. Dressed in white and covered with bruises, the pale Kidman is created as an innocent, wounded woman on the road to healing and blossoming as an individual, unattached to a husband or partner.

Besides discussing her romantic relationships and recoveries, the article also addresses developments in Kidman’s acting career. Kidman’s career is the only other subject of focus in the article. However, even the discussion of her career is organized in regard to her romantic relationship with Cruise. A large portion of the text—three paragraphs—is committed to Kidman’s work on *The Hours*, which has marked Nicole’s emergence into independence and feminist thought since her divorce. Millea explains that

before her marriage to Cruise, Kidman “was headed for a solid, respectable career,” but nothing of the magnitude she experienced after wedding Cruise. In addition, Millea also includes several comments from other professionals in the film business about Kidman and her career. However, all of these comments are made by male professionals, such as Luhrmann, “who cast Kidman as the singing, dancing courtesan satine in *Moulin Rouge*.” These males have often also been the directors and producers who have cast Kidman in roles, advancing her career by granting her acting opportunities.

After analyzing the full text of the article, the text can be further examined in regard to characterization. Kidman is characterized, as I have mentioned, as having nearly two identities, although they do overlap in some instances. These identities are marked by her marital status to Cruise, one married and one divorced. Furthermore, Kidman is paradoxically described as strong and weak, independent and dependent. However, Kidman is primarily characterized as weak and dependent during her marriage to Cruise, and strong and independent in the time period following her divorce.

The first mention of Kidman’s personal strength is noted as Kidman describes “building a fence with Renee Zellweger...lifting these huge logs. The men couldn’t lift them.” Kidman continues to assert her independence from men, responding to the topic of being single, “But it’s important to take the time. Not push it. I’m just quietly healing.” She not only appears to be comfortable with being single, but also rejoices in the chance for growth, “...there’s something about being a woman and having to stand on your own two feet alone...But I do have relief now, knowing that I can survive.”

Millea paints a different picture of Kidman as she was when she was married to Cruise, “Head down, she was usually holding Tom’s hand, walking to steps behind.”

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herself to triumph over her struggle. She describes looking at herself in the mirror, removing her focus from the opinions of others, and finding a comforting reality. She explains, “I saw a twinkle in my eye. That was the sign that I was down but not out...” Having recognized her own strength, Ralph realized that she “was ready to leave the pain of the past and take the first step forward” and that she “couldn’t let [her] divorce be the death of [her].” Like Kidman, Ralph struggled long enough until she came to the conclusion that she “had to start the journey right away, on [her] own,” detached from any romantic relationship.

Ralph identifies herself as a weak and despondent woman as she is still emotionally attached to her past relationship. Being alone, left with “two beautiful children who needed [her] at her best,” Ralph “sank into a depression that caused [her] to doubt everything about [herself].” Having finally set aside her emotional injury and her fears of others’ disapproval, Ralph was able to recognize again that “life’s an up and down thing and how you handle those ups and downs is the true test of who you are.”

Ralph describes herself as having triumphed over the depression caused by her divorce. She explains that, in order to triumph over her struggle, she had to look within and recognize that she was still fundamentally the same strong woman she’d always been—married or divorced, with husband or without.

Neither Kidman nor Ralph are portrayed as invincible women, constantly shimmering with celebrity perfection. *Elle* and *O* treat their subjects kindly but honestly, describing their struggles with candid journalism. Both Kidman and Ralph are approaching middle age, have young children, and have the same responsibilities many

single mothers have. In addition, their celebrity status exposes their personal lives to public spotlight, placing further pressure on them.

It is important to note how similarly these two magazines treat the struggles of these two celebrity women. First, these women come from similar backgrounds and circumstances, as I have just discussed. Kidman and Ralph have suffered a break from their male partners and share their divorce struggles in the articles. The articles make clear that Kidman and Ralph have experienced significant changes in their lives, their personalities, and their values as a result of their divorces. In the conclusions of the articles, it seems that divorce—their separation from male partners—has made these women stronger, more self-aware, and more confident in their own strength.

Glamour. In the article, “Julia Speaks Her Mind,” *Glamour* features “one of Hollywood’s hottest actresses, who also happens to be a feminist and a Shakespeare fan,” Julia Stiles (see Appendix O). The article is formatted differently from the other magazines’, beginning with an editorial introduction by the journalist and then a series of Stiles’s thoughts on the “dos and don’ts” of a young woman’s life. Although still young, Stiles has formulated these “dos and don’ts” through her own experience with challenge and hardship.

However, Stiles’s challenges and hardships have included nothing like the divorces Kidman and Ralph have withstood. *Glamour* journalist Gia Kourlas emphasizes that what is most difficult about Stiles’s life lies in her “jam-packed day planner.” According to Kourlas, Stiles has a nearly impossible schedule, fitting in big-screen acting roles, extensive volunteer work, and a rigorous education at Columbia University. Fittingly, the article is filled with action verbs, portraying Stiles as an active,

spontaneous, and ambitious young woman. In fact, one section of the article, entitled “Julia tells...‘How I made myself over’,” details her adventurous feats in physical training, hair dyeing, and modern dancing.

This characterization of Stiles is further developed by the commentary of her co-stars. According to Selma Blair, Julia “has the mouth of a truck driver,” and to Kerry Washington, “Julia’s a brave, grounded, normal person.” Not to mention, as Maggie Gyllenhaal points out, “She’s really got her brain on.” These co-stars of Stiles call attention to the young actress’s seeming ability to “do it all” and “be it all.”

Instructing her readers to “take chances...be a feminist” and to not “have expectations when dating,” Stiles is characterized as being carefree, open to change and her own independence. She encourages readers to “do exercises that make [them] feel good,” without thinking, “I have to do this and I have to do that.” Furthermore, she supports women’s self-direction.

Stiles is not portrayed as an injured woman recovering from a traumatic break in a relationship, as are Kidman and Ralph. Instead, Stiles appears to be a clean slate, still independent from marriage and still developing her views on feminism, Shakespeare, and music. In Kourlas’s article, Stiles is not described as having recently overcome a great hardship at all, but to have gradually built her strength as an independent individual. Stiles’s triumph, then, has been her success in cultivating many strong views and values, which she boldly shares in this article, while juggling the countless extraordinary responsibilities of her life.

Most importantly, the article about Stiles mentions only very briefly her relationship with her boyfriend, and mentions her connection with men only once again

in relation to her experience as an outspoken feminist. When talking to men about her feminist beliefs, Stiles explains that she tries hard “not to alienate the men and to make them understand that a lot of feminists *love* men.” Stiles, then, is not portrayed as a man-hating feminist, but as a self-secure, woman-supporting young woman.

Ms. Predictably, journalist Carol Wheeler’s article, “Jamie Lee Curtis,” in *Ms.* magazine, which is about actress and children’s book author Jamie Lee Curtis, does not address the subject of men even once (see Appendix P). Instead, Wheeler’s article focuses on Curtis’s struggle with her body image. Wheeler explains that, having entered middle-age, Curtis has experienced her body changing but the pressures of stardom remaining the same. In response, Curtis does not cater to those pressures with plastic surgery and makeup, but takes a strong stand on self-acceptance.

Both Curtis herself and Wheeler depict the star as frank, unpretentious, and ultimately self-accepting. Having resolved to be a “truth-teller” and to live an “authentic life,” Curtis decided to proclaim her Hollywood self-acceptance by revealing unedited, untouched photos of her unclothed body, as well as candid interviews in both the September 2002 issue of *More* magazine and the Winter 2002-2003 issue of *Ms.* After revealing an honest picture of her imperfect celebrity body, Curtis encourages readers to “understand that [a beautiful image of a woman in a fashion magazine] [is] a fake image, that those pictures are controlled and rebuilt and retouched and edited.”

The article describes Curtis’s physical appearance just as candidly. Wheeler describes Curtis’s photos, “The not-quite-naked Jamie looking just as happy, but bare-faced and rather pigeon-toed—in unstructured sports bra and unflattering black underpants, with little pouches of flab spilling over the edges.” Readers who responded to

the *More* article called Curtis the “‘Poster goddess for the real woman’,” further emphasizing her unmistakably flawed—but still beautiful—physique. Most importantly,

Curtis is described as being happy, “sport[ing] a big smile”

skin,” and “delighted to have reached that point.”

Curtis’s obstacle, in essence, was her uneasiness with being flawed in an industry and a world that expects celebrities to be flawless. In order to triumph over her struggle, Curtis let go of the feelings and thoughts that had once led her to “‘a little plastic surgery...a little lipo...a little Botox’.” The article explains that Curtis overcame her insecurities on her own, looking within herself and realizing that regardless of “...all those trips to the gym, all that dieting, all that dreaming—time goes on, flab happens, laugh lines and bulges inevitably appear.”

In addition, Curtis has looked to her other talents to gain self-fulfillment. In the opening sentence of the article, Wheeler notes that even Curtis’s latest children’s book, *I’m Gonna Like Me: Letting Off a Little Self-Esteem*, reflects her recent victory. Wheeler describes Curtis as being less interested in reporters’ amazement at her body-baring magazine debut and much more interested in talking about her writing, “...could we stop discussing my incredible bravery and talk about my new book?”

Considering the reputation of *Ms.* as a feminist publication, it is not surprising

Cosmopolitan, but rather for the more sophisticated, more well-rounded and aware woman. Finally, although *O* has not long been in publication, it is generally seen as a magazine for the 40-something woman interested in matters of home, politics, relationships, children, and practical fashion.

The covers of *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* seem to glorify men—suggesting to women how they can better please them, impress them, and appreciate them. However, the information that lies inside—in the articles I have just analyzed—communicate different values to the reader.

Analysis

If the text of a magazine communicates the shared values and identities of its readers, then these articles about extraordinary celebrity women in *Elle*, *Glamour*, *Ms.*, and *O* do just that. The women highlighted in these articles are being recognized for accomplishing remarkable personal successes, for being exceptional role models for other women, especially readers. The articles about these role model women in *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* do not reflect the values and identities that their covers do, however.

Converse to the messages communicated by their covers, each of the magazine's articles communicate to the reader the idea that happiness is not achieved only by the attainment and maintenance of romantic relationships. *Elle*'s article, "Who's Afraid of Nicole Kidman?" presents Nicole Kidman as a more self-confident, sturdy person since splitting from her husband and surviving the emotional trials of divorce. *Glamour*'s article, "Julia Speaks Her Mind" portrays Julia Stiles as an outspoken, liberal-thinking, joyful young woman who has not ventured into marriage territory. *O* gives Sheryl Lee

Ralph a forum in “Sheryl Lee Ralph’s Aha! Moment” to share her healed life, which she now lives independently and happily.

Both Kidman and Ralph are portrayed as having been wounded by the separation from their husbands. Each is described as once feeling empty and dejected because of the loss of their spouses. However, they are also described as having healed from their wounds—on their own. During the healing process, each became more aware of herself, of her weaknesses and strengths and ultimately, of her joy for life that lies within. Since finding that joy, neither woman expresses a need to find greater joy from a romantic relationship. Similarly, Stiles instructs her readers not to seek fulfillment from relationships, but from many aspects of their lives, including their personal interests—exercise, fashion and beauty, literature, movies, music.

Like these articles, *Ms.* presents a female celebrity who has found fulfillment within herself. However, in the *Ms.* article, “Jamie Lee Curtis,” Curtis is not related to men as the female celebrities in the other three articles are. Curtis is described to have overcome her struggle with body image, independent of men, and to have found satisfaction from her other interests and talents. *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* say the same of their featured celebrities. Millea explains that Kidman finds great satisfaction in her career now, playing roles that challenge her ideas of femininity and patriarchy. Stiles expresses her contentment with exploring her interests in casual dating, experimentation with beauty products, Shakespeare, dorm-living, the music of Ani DiFranco, and exercises in self-control. Furthermore, Ralph explains that she finds great satisfaction in knowing that she now lives a healthy, happy single life and provides a positive example for her two young children.

What is different about the *Ms.* article from the rest is not its message, but that its message does not contradict the magazine as a whole. The message of all the magazine articles is indeed the same—women, readers included, can experience happiness, success, and triumph over struggle as individuals, outside of romantic relationships with men. Women can survive separating from men and living without men as romantic partners. Women have interests that are as valuable or more valuable than their interest in relationships with men. Women are capable of being happy, successful, and healthy without having romantic relationships with men.

Having closely examined the cover-lines of these magazines, which purportedly provide summaries of the magazines' contents, the obviously contradictory message of these articles is shocking. On the other hand, the cover of *Ms.* displays no contradiction; it advertises articles about female political leaders, "Nancy Pelosi: Exactly the Leadership We Need" and other extraordinary women, "2002 Women of the Year! 13 Stories of Humor, Humanity & Courage." Judging from these cover-lines, the producers and readers of *Ms.* clearly believe that women are valuable, capable, happy human beings, regardless of their relationships with men. Wheeler's article in *Ms.* reflects the same concept; by her individual strengths, Curtis has become comfortable and confident with her body and her talents.

The other three articles reflect this concept as well; Kidman, Stiles, and Ralph have found personal fulfillment outside their romantic relationships. In fact, it seems that Kidman and Ralph have found a more complete sense of satisfaction with their lives since they have left their romantic relationships and faced their struggles alone. However, the covers of *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* tell women that acquiring and maintaining the

affections of men is a significant goal. While the cover of *Elle* encourages readers to read on about "Every Hunk in Hollywood--Including Russell and Tom!", the cover of *Glamour* urges readers to find out about "The 8 Things Men Wish We'd Do More of in Bed." *O*'s cover tells readers that "Choosing the right man" is essential to being "happily married," and that there is indeed a "best way to get back in the game" after divorce.

Obviously, men are of great importance to the producers and readers of *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O*. These readers believe that men are an integral part of their lives; they read about them in order to learn more about them, to learn how to please them, and to learn how to win and keep their affections. But if the text of magazines reflects reader identity and values, then the readers of these magazines also believe that life goes on without men, and that pleasing oneself is often just as important as pleasing one's partner. Readers of these magazines hold the latter set of values as well, as reflected by the articles about Kidman, Stiles, and Ralph.

If the articles in *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* proclaim the same truths about women's lives as the article in *Ms.*, why do their covers indicate differently? Why does *Ms.* feature cover-lines completely devoid of the mention of men, and *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* present cover-lines chockfull of suggestions about dealing with men? In the case that the celebrity articles in *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* are exceptional to the rest, that the majority of the magazines' texts do not reflect the theme of female independence, then why is that so? Why do *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* present female celebrities as satisfied, independent single women, and contrastingly depict average female readers as focused and dependent upon men's desires and opinions?

Having examined the covers and pieces of text of each of the magazines, I will also draw conclusions about their similarities as Eggins and Iedema (1997) did in their study. *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *Ms.* feature one distinctive similarity: orientation to appearance. Both *Elle* and *Glamour* feature makeover sections, as *Elle* promises to teach readers how to "Transform Your Body" for a "New You," and *Glamour* promises, "The hair! The clothes! The compliments! And gazillions of tips you can use." The *Elle* article, "Who's Afraid of Nicole Kidman," provides a detailed physical description of Kidman, emphasizing her dainty, lady-like presence and charming natural beauty. In *Glamour*, Stiles offers readers her personal beauty advice, insisting in particular that they try "...the best beauty product...Tend Skin--it's an aftershave, but you can put it on your zits and it clears them up." The article in *Ms.* centers almost entirely around Curtis's physical appearance, detailing how Curtis defeated the self-inflicted and industry-inflicted pressures to be physically perfect. Although physical appearance is mentioned much more infrequently in the *O* article, Ralph does write that "...the real blow came when [her] hair started falling out," and that she finally found new strength after seeing "a twinkle in [her] eye."

Elle, *Glamour*, and *O* also share the similarity of promoting heterosexual relationships. Eggins and Iedema call this similarity in their study "responsible heterosexuality," but *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* do not particularly emphasize the need for responsibility in heterosexual relationships. As earlier discussed, the covers of *Glamour* and *O* promote heterosexuality far more intensely than the other two magazines. The cover of *Elle* briefly mentions Kidman's heterosexual relationships, but the cover of *Ms.* is completely devoid of such reference. The cover of *O*, on the other hand, presents a

plethora of article advertisements about relationships with men. In addition, the featured celebrity articles in *Elle* and *O* concentrate heavily on Kidman's and Ralph's heterosexual relationships and those relationships' effects on their lives. In the *Glamour* article, Stiles references her relationship with her boyfriend at college, and offers dating advice to readers, "Don't have expectations when dating...Don't put on airs during initial dates." The article about Curtis in *Ms.* does not discuss her relationships, heterosexual or otherwise, but rather focuses entirely on Curtis herself.

Traces of desocialization also appear in *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O*. As Eggins and Iedema (1997) explain about *New Woman* and *SHE*, these magazines "separate[s] the world into 'men' and 'women', but differences in social class, economic or educational background, and ethnicity are not explicitly mentioned" (p. 169). Judging from its cover, *Elle* appears to be a desocializing magazine, separating the celebrity world into men and women, featuring "Nicole Kidman...and Every Hunk in Hollywood--Including Russell and Tom!" The article in *Elle* characterizes Kidman in relation to her ex-husband, most obviously, but also features Kidman's directly quoted opinions on her male co-stars. However, Kidman is also related to other individuals in the film industry, "one of the few actresses worthy of Meryl Streephood," "Before [Cruise], she was headed for a solid, respectable career as an actress in the same boat as, say, her fellow Aussie Judy Davis." Kidman is not portrayed entirely in contrast to men, but also in contrast to other actresses, in relation to popularity and career quality. This contrast creates a sort of rank or class difference among females in the film industry, placing Kidman at the top since the split with her ex-husband.

In the *Glamour* article, Stiles does not compare herself to other individuals within her business. She offers her readers advice about dating men and about sharing feminist opinions with men, who, she believes, may be "prejudiced against the word *feminism*." The article about Stiles, then, reflects the same presence of desocialization that the *Glamour* cover-lines "His & Hers *Sex Checklist" and "The 8 Things Men Wish We'd Do More of in Bed" do.

O presents the most obviously desocialized text of the four magazines. With 4 of its 7 cover-lines dealing with the theme of love and intimacy with men, and an article focusing on a female celebrity and her divorce, *O* presents an overwhelmingly desocialized characteristic.

Judging by its cover and celebrity article, *Ms.* shares this desocialized characteristic to a minimal extent. Almost every cover-line of the magazine discusses women, with no mention of their relation to men. The cover-line that references men, "The New Law That Could Nail Those Priests," casts a negative light upon the male priests being referred to. As I stated earlier, the article featuring Curtis does not once refer to men.

Finally, each of the magazines shares the characteristic of personalization, which creates "a confiding personal relationship with the individual reader, encouraging her to identify with the feminine community" (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 169). It is this reader identity-formation, constructed by reader-text interaction, that "contributes to the desocialization of women, preventing the reader from becoming aware of herself as a socio-historical subject, who is being actively positioned by the texts she reads" (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 169). In essence, these four women's magazines, *Elle*, *Glamour*, *O*,

and *Ms.*, draw in female readers, engage them in dialogue with the text, and invite them to identify with the text's messages about femininity. Furthermore, readers are persuaded to identify with the magazine's definition of a woman, her values, and her interests. To identify with this definition is to be a "voluntary member of a classless community of beautiful and successful women," and to "experience a sometimes real and sometimes utopian sense of community while reading these texts" (Eggins & Iedema, 1997, p. 169).

In the *Elle* article, Millea first paints a visual portrait of Kidman, the very picture of femininity. She is fragile, pale, and elegant, easily bruised by manual labor and most content "sitting at a corner booth in the garden of Hollywood's Hotel Bel-Air, head tilted, cheek in hand, fast asleep." By the end of the first paragraph, the reader constructs a mental picture of *Elle's* ideal of femininity.

Millea continues to characterize Kidman as overtly feminine, detailing the celebrity's position as "Hollywood's new Lit Girl" who plays the roles of emotionally scarred women. Readers quickly learn that Kidman herself is a scarred woman, having recently endured a dramatic divorce with actor Tom Cruise. After reading about Kidman's devastated response to this event, she appears to the reader to be injured, once dependent upon her romantic relationship for security and happiness.

Although Kidman appears wounded by her loss, she has since stepped into Hollywood's spotlight and out of Cruise's shadow. Millea explains that since Kidman's divorce, Hollywood has seen the star more for who she is than for the role she played as Cruise's partner. Millea points out, too, that this is a result of Kidman blossoming into herself since the divorce, becoming "a woman in full possession of her power as an actress, her sexuality, and her sense of self." Kidman has also become more tolerant of

the ambiguities in her life. She closes the interview, explaining, "I don't know anything anymore. I'm so naïve now."

The reader of *Elle* is presented with an unmistakable image of delicate, fragile femininity, complicated by personal trials and celebrated for inner-strength. Kidman began as a woman dependent upon her husband, suffered a devastating divorce, and then found the power to rebuild her life—a life even fuller than before. Likewise, *O* presents a successful female celebrity who has had to lose her male partner in order to find herself.

Authored by the celebrity herself, the article in *O* does not paint a visual image of the star like the article in *Elle* does. Instead, Sheryl Lee Ralph begins right away to characterize the woman she used to be, a woman much more closely in tune with the lyrics, "D-I-V-O-R-C-E" than "R-E-S-P-E-C-T." Ralph describes the darkness she experienced after her divorce, which plagued her until she looked into the mirror and "All of a sudden the sorrow began to pour out of [her] and tears burned [her] face." As she awoke to her profound importance as a mother, regardless of her value as a wife, she declared to herself that it was time to "start that journey right away, on [her] own," in order to save herself.

The reader of *O* is given a role model in Sheryl Lee Ralph who is similar to Kidman; Ralph's character begins as a lamenting divorcee, suffering "...times when the pain was so deep, [she] just wanted to feel better somehow, anyhow." She reaches a point of crisis and chooses to release her grief, deciding to build herself anew for the sake of her sanity and the well-being of her young children. Ralph closes by writing, "D-I-V-O-R-C-E was hard, but I found out what it meant to me." As Kidman does in the *Elle*

article, Ralph seems to reach a more self-satisfying awareness of herself and her life as a result of the separation from her husband.

Unlike the women featured in *Elle* and *O*, the female celebrity featured in *Glamour* increases her self-awareness without the constraints or pains of marriage. Julia Stiles is portrayed not as fragile, but down-to-earth, levelheaded, and uncommonly wise for her age. She offers advice to female readers, "Don't put on airs during initial dates. Even if he buys into your front, he'll eventually discover that you're a different person." In other words, she encourages readers to be proud enough of who they are not to change themselves to impress or please their male partners. Instead of furthering this topic, Julia continues to encourage readers to develop other facets of their lives, "Do read Shakespeare," "Do seek out inspiration," and "Do express yourself." By offering these tidbits of advice and providing examples of how she does these things in her own life, Stiles indirectly sends readers the message that self-awareness is essential to fulfillment. She explains that at this point in her life, she doesn't "have expectations when dating." Clearly, Stiles is more interested in developing herself than in developing any type of romantic relationship.

Elle, *Glamour*, and *O* present a strong message to their readers in these articles: women are often defined by their romantic relationships with men, but they do not have to be. Women can be sufficiently happy and self-aware after failed romantic relationships, or simply without romantic relationships. The article about celebrity Jamie Lee Curtis in *Ms* demonstrates these truths.

The article on Curtis makes no mention about her relationships with men, or of her relationships with anyone for that matter. Curtis is the sole focal point of the article;

writer Carol Wheeler celebrates Curtis's self-assured decision to proudly bare her imperfect body to the world. Wheeler also repeatedly returns to Curtis's achievements as a children's book writer having just published her fifth book. The reader of *Ms.* is presented with an exceptionally positive impression of Curtis, a famous actress and author who also happens to be an ordinary, flawed human being. Curtis is by no means presented as impeccably feminine, but "...rather pigeon-toed...with little pouches of flab spilling over the edges." With her focus averted from her Hollywood image, she is touching the lives of women all over the world who write, "If Jamie Lee can be herself, so can I," in response to Curtis's proclamation of self-acceptance in magazines and on talk shows. Curtis calls the images of perfection in the media fraudulent and simply unattainable. The message Wheeler sends about Curtis, ultimately, is that she is authentic—physically flawed, and even once tricked by "a little plastic surgery...a little lipo...a little Botox" into trying to be "Glam Jamie, the Perfect Jamie." However, she has since grown into a happy, independent woman, content with her body and her talents, regardless of others' interpretations of them.

The *Ms.* article about Curtis thoroughly complements its cover. Reader identity, as it is presented on the cover and in the text, is consistent. Its cover implies that *Ms.* readers are primarily interested women's issues, which the cover identifies as politics, changes in legislation, and courageous female role models. At least part of the text, the article spotlighting celebrity Jamie Lee Curtis, addresses just what the cover advertises, "Jamie Lee Curtis Exposes—Herself!"

However, the reader identity presented in *Elle*, *Glamour*, and *O* is far from consistent. These magazines' covers portray readers as interested primarily in